

Cecily Brown: A Conspicuous Gaze

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An indescribable and nearly everlasting gaze is what seizes you when you look at Cecily Brown's work.



Cecily Brown, *The use of blue in vertigo*, 2022. Oil on linen, 59 × 94 inches (149.9 × 238.8 cm).

© Cecily Brown. Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. Photo: Genevieve Hanson.

The use of blue in vertigo is the name of this luscious painting by Cecily Brown above, and it's additionally a reference to the 1958 film *Vertigo*, and the movie's common use of blue exhibited within it. The parallels between both pieces are strong, and the vivid colors in *Vertigo*'s cinematography consist of strong symbolism, as in Brown's painting. A diluted gray painting with main accents of purple and several other colors displays multiple pictures hidden within that you may need to look farther and closer to capture truly. *Vertigo* is a feeling of a revolving, spinning sensation, and it's lucidly expressed in this work with the loopy strokes, and the eyes hidden within the work itself.

Brown has molded her own version of abstraction with her paintings over the last 30 years. In 1969, London didn't know what was coming when Cecily Brown was born and how she would change sexuality being portrayed in art forever. Brown had been attending art school for about 8 years in total. She started with her B-TEC Diploma in Art and Design at the Epsom

School of Art, which she attended for 2 years. She followed with another 2 years being a student at Morley College where she took drawing and printmaking classes. Finally, she received her BA in Fine Arts at the Slade School of Fine Art. All the schools mentioned were located in England, contrasting her current residence and workplace in the Big Apple.¹

Brown became known in the art world in the mid-1990s with her abstract bunny painting, *Untitled* (1996). Brown is a contemporary painter who participated in such movements as Abstract Expressionism, Neo-Expressionism, and Surrealism. During the time Brown was creating works, was also when the Young British Artists movement was flourishing.² However, she didn't personally align herself with this particular group despite what most people thought.³ Brown isn't particularly drawn to attaching labels to herself, and her work is quite interpretive.

The themes found in Brown's work are ultimately alluring and quite brilliant. Common themes are sexuality, pornography, and attraction. Brown has multiple intimate paintings where the male and female bodies are nude, and the whole work is infused with eroticism.⁴ These works display a "counter" and her own version of liberation. The distinguishing between the two is critical especially when one of the main themes of Brown's works is feminism, unlike her male counterparts, in which they strongly sexualize women in their works.

Subjects seen in Brown's works aren't limited to sensuality. A key exhibition of Brown's work was at the Blenheim Palace, England. In these paintings, Brown depicted death, fragmentation, politics, battle, and overall war.⁵ This is her way of implementing other parts of her childhood and identity within her work.

Brown isn't too fond of labels, but her works would fall under the style of Abstract Expressionism gestural style. There is a heavy emphasis on figuration and abstraction in her work. Brown uses layers and layers to hide and carefully paint hidden figures. However, a lot of her pieces are erotic and lively, which is further pushed by her bright colors and strong gestures. It's all precisely intended for the viewers to be in a position of voyeurism. You can detect tensions and movements that all lead to Brown's paintings solicitously working their way into piercing an observer's eye and catalyzing a neverending stare to truly figure it out.

¹ *Cecily Brown BIOGRAPHY* (Paula Cooper Gallery)

² *Cecily Brown* (Gagosian)

³ *Cecily Brown* (Gagosian)

⁴ *Artist – Cecily Brown Biography* (DIPChain, 2019)

⁵ Louisa Buck, *Cecily Brown: 'I'm Trying to Understand What England Means to Me'*

Brown's artistic process quoted here can be described as something fun and lively. Starting a new life on canvas, and with all the colors to choose, as Brown said, beginning a painting is one of her favorite parts. However, she has stated that "one misplaced stroke could ruin everything." Brown's works incorporate great focus and intention with all her strokes, and the beginning of a painting for her will move really quickly for those first days. She, however, says that the middle period is very "protracted", meaning it's a lengthy period of time where she's editing and making changes. Her overall motto is that you can't be too much in your head while painting.⁶

Gagosian, Larry. "Cecily Brown." Gagosian, April 12, 2018.

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"Cecily Brown: I Take Things Too Far When Painting." The Guardian, September 20, 2009.

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/sep/20/guide-to-painting-cecily-brown>.

⁶ Perri Lewis, Cecily Brown: I take things too far when painting (The Guardian 2009)